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Book Section

# SECRECY AND DEMOCRACY

*The CIA in Transition.*
*By Stansfield Turner.*
*304 pp. Boston:*
*Houghton Mifflin Company. $16.95.*

## By Thomas Powers

THE Central Intelligence Agency inherited in 1977 by Stansfield Turner, a Navy admiral who would have preferred a shot at being Chief of Naval Operations, was by all reports (Admiral Turner's now included) a thoroughly demoralized institution — confused about its role, bitter at its treatment in newspaper headlines and top-heavy with acrimonious veterans of the agency's glory years when the cold war was young. Counterintelligence specialists were at each other's throats, analysts had been more or less publicly rebuked for failing to spot a massive Soviet military buildup, and Senate investigators had recently completed a freewheeling rummage through agency files of a sort reserved for the intelligence service of nations occupied by a foreign power. What Admiral Turner did with this heaven-sent opportunity is the subject of his short, interesting and highly unusual memoir.

Only in America, as Harry Golden used to say, could the affairs of a secret intelligence service have come to such a sorry pass. It is not at all unusual for intelligence services to find themselves seriously at odds with their nominal bosses. On three occasions since 1917, for example, the Soviet Government has found it necessary to shoot the chief of the secret police. But in most countries — including democracies like France and Britain — the periodic reorganization of the secret services takes place in deep quiet behind the scenes.

IT is hard to know which troubles American intelligence professionals more (not to mention allies abroad) — the exposure of so much operational history during the C.I.A.'s time of troubles, or the fact that Admiral Turner, the man President Jimmy Carter asked to patch things up, has now chosen to explain in public what he did and why he did it in detail enough to alarm his successors. The first was a traumatic hemorrhage. James Jesus Angleton, the C.I.A.'s legendary chief of counterintelligence, despaired because he believed that the opposition would build up "a deep chrono" (or chronology) as damaging as a spy in the agency, and Mr. Angleton was far from alone in his fears.

But Admiral Turner's memoir suggests that real public discussion of intelligence is here to stay. This is bound to have important consequences. It is a kind of natural law of democracies that the longer you examine any important issue publicly, the more complicated it gets. Admiral Turner believes that democracy and secrecy are compatible, that we can openly debate what we are about and then pursue our goals secretly without stumbling over the inevitable provisos, limitations, expectations and compromises that come with public rules, not all of them written. "It's almost mandatory today that the Agency's lawyers be consulted before sensitive operations are undertaken and often as they progress," Admiral Turner writes. "Lawyers have become an integral part of the operations team. There is no doubt that this can create an overly legalistic atmosphere. What can be said in mitigation is that the laws and rules apply mostly to interference with Americans and hence do not greatly affect most foreign intelligence espionage operations."

The professionals doubt this. How can they fight a secret guerrilla war in Nicaragua, as the Reagan Administration asked them to do, without a great deal of indiscriminate violence — banned by the rules? How can they run a secret counterterrorism program in the Middle East without resorting to terror — banned by the rules? How can they recruit unwilling spies, aid the police of brutal but "friendly" regimes, steal information from friendly as well as hostile powers, undermine or overthrow legal governments and sow discord through disinformation — all part of the C.I.A.'s daily round since its birth in 1947 (along with a good deal else of course) — when these things all prick at the conscience of democracies? Admiral Turner has set himself a formidable task. His book is no idle tale of spies, but a serious and valuable contribution to a debate that cuts close to the bone of power in a world of sin and danger.

"Secrecy and Democracy" received no pat on the back from the C.I.A. under Admiral Turner's successor, William Casey. The agency insisted on more than 100 deletions from early manuscripts, and got all but three. In a prefatory note, Admiral Turner calls the review process — which he himself established — arbitrary, irresponsible, devious and unnecessarily open-ended. He more or less directly accuses the C.I.A. of trying to muffle criticism under the guise of preserving legitimate secrets. Critics of the review process warned this would be a problem from the beginning, and they were right. But the book has survived the scissors, and its central arguments are made with a vigorous candor altogether missing from most official discussion of the practice of intelligence.

Getting control of the C.I.A. was Admiral Turner's first and longest-running problem. "When the first annual budget came to me for approval, everything had been decided," he writes. "The three branches expected me to rubber-stamp what they wanted. . . . It wasn't long after Frank Carlucci arrived [as Deputy Director of the C.I.A.] that he came to share my concerns. . . . We decided that we were not really in charge of a single CIA, but of three separate organizations [the clandestine operations, intelligence analysis and support] operating almost with autonomy. Neither of us had ever seen anything like it."

At one point during his tenure, Admiral Turner fired a C.I.A. officer who had lied to his boss about an affair he was having with a female agent. "As I saw it, if this man could lie to his superiors and get away with it, his superiors might conclude that they could lie to their superiors, and so on up the line to me," Admiral Turner writes. "What was at stake was control of the Agency."

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Stansfield Turner appears to be a typical product of his profession and generation. A 1946 graduate of the United States Naval Academy, he learned his job in the postwar Navy and his politics in the postwar world. Managing technology ruled the one, managing Russia the other. Admiral Turner is far from being an ideologue; he doesn't even qualify as a hard-liner. He seems to be a practical, fair-minded, no-nonsense sort, and nothing during his four years as Director of Central Intelligence seems to have shocked and troubled him more than the politics of intelligence in Washington.

The running of spies and all that goes with it seems to have made Admiral Turner uncomfortable. He had no instinct for the black arts. Stripped to its essence, intelligence is the pursuit of secret advantage. The traditional criteria for means are purely utilitarian. The admiral was asked to separate the fair means from the foul and he seems to have gone about it with a will. His distaste for the bad old days is evident in a kind of compulsive prettying-up of the record. He suggests, for example, that the C.I.A. embarked on a thoroughly nasty drug-testing program begun in the 1950's because the agency was "fearful that these largely untested drugs might be used on American intelligence officers." You could say that. But the real enthusiasm for the program was based on fantasies of finding chemical "magic bullets" that would make enemy agents spill the beans or induce selective amnesia in friendly agents when they ceased to be useful. When it comes to the darker side of intelligence, Admiral Turner tends to call a spade a digging implement, and his book takes on the cheerful vagueness of a 19th-century marriage manual dealing with Problems of the First Night.

But when it comes to the often bitter wrangles of competing intelligence agencies in Washington, Admiral Turner does not sugar the pill. The Director of Central Intelligence is the nominal chief of the entire intelligence community, but its components are truculent by temperament and two of them — the National Security Agency, which collects an astonishing range of broadcast signals, and the Defense Intelligence Agency, which represents the Pentagon — are simply too big to be ordered around. Some of the wrangling is the natural tooth and claw of bureaucracies all trying to fit through the same door at the same time, but the bigger part of it (and certainly the part hardest to grasp and control) stems from something peculiarly American — official insistence that defense policy is based on intelligence assessments.

ON one level this makes sense: why build mighty military forces unless there is a threat to match? Perhaps it really worked this way in the late 1940's — threat first, defense spending after. But now we have a huge military establishment with plans, hopes, problems and a constituency of its own. In order to proceed with an expensive new weapons system it needs a piece of paper from the intelligence community, preferably signed by the Director of Central Intelligence, endorsing the threat the new system is intended to counter. In theory the intelligence community takes precedence. But how is it to resist the vast gravitational pull of the Pentagon? It is no accident that the huge military buildup that started under President Carter, and has soared under President Reagan, began with the so-called "A-team, B-team" exercise of 1976, in which an outside team of hard-line defense analysts went head to head with the C.I.A.'s Soviet specialists and forced through a "more somber" view of Russian military programs.

Admiral Turner has interesting things to say about counterintelligence, covert action (perhaps necessary "once or twice during an administration"), the Iranian crisis and the like, but the real meat of his book is to be found in his frank account of the intelligence wars. Through the dust of skirmishing over turf, sources and the interpretation of ambiguous evidence can be seen the larger problem of intelligence in a democracy — the almost glacial pressures exerted by a military establishment with a gut instinct for who the enemy is and a runaway appetite for hardware. □

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